FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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FOR MORE INFORMATION
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VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH PROMOTES
NATIONAL HIV TESTING DAY

(RICHMOND, Va.) —On June 27, the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) will join organizations across the nation to recognize the 11th annual National HIV Testing Day and encourage individuals to get tested for Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). Local health departments, AIDS service organizations and other community-based groups will provide extended testing hours, special testing events and public education as part of this year's activities. Free, confidential test sites are available throughout the state with anonymous, oral and rapid testing available in some localities.

During this year's campaign, VDH is highlighting Virginia's law, enacted in 1995, requiring health care providers to offer HIV counseling and testing to all pregnant women. With proper treatment, the risk of HIV transmission from mother to child can be drastically reduced. However, some women and their doctors may think that the risk of contracting HIV is minimal.

"All pregnant women should get tested for HIV regardless of their socioeconomic status, marital status, geographic area, or race. Such factors cannot ensure that these women are free of risk for contracting HIV," said State Health Commissioner Robert B. Stroube, M.D., M.P.H. "VDH is working to change such misperceptions so that no child is born to an HIV-infected woman without the benefit of treatment."

Approximately 22,000 people in Virginia are living with HIV, and up to one third of those individuals may not know they are infected. In 2004, 79,000 Virginians were tested in publicly funded clinics, and 875 new HIV cases were reported.

"Knowing your HIV status is a major component of HIV prevention. People who know that they are HIV-infected are far more likely to reduce risky behaviors that can transmit the virus than are individuals who are infected but haven't been tested," said Casey W. Riley, director of VDH's Division of HIV, STD, and Pharmacy Services. "By encouraging individuals to get tested, we can assist Virginians to take control of their health and reduce new HIV infections in the Commonwealth."

For more information about HIV/AIDS, test sites, and other sexually transmitted diseases, contact the HIV/STD/Viral Hepatitis Hotline at (800) 533-4148 or visit www.vdh.virginia.gov/std. You can also visit the site to see list of statewide activities commemorating National HIV Testing Day. Events are subject to change.

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